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# National Institute of Justice

## S o l i c i t a t i o n

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*Jeremy Travis, Director*

*July 1998*

### Communicating Research Findings: Assessing the Communication Strategies and Products of the National Institute of Justice

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: September 15, 1998**

**U.S. Department of Justice**  
**Office of Justice Programs**  
810 Seventh Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20531

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*Attorney General*  
U.S. Department of Justice

**Raymond C. Fisher**  
*Associate Attorney General*

**Laurie Robinson**  
*Assistant Attorney General*

**Noël Brennan**  
*Deputy Assistant Attorney General*

**Jeremy Travis**  
*Director, National Institute of Justice*

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**Department of Justice Response Center:**  
800-421-6770

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**Office of Justice Programs**  
**World Wide Web Site:**  
*<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov>*

**National Institute of Justice**  
**World Wide Web Site:**  
*<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij>*

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# Communicating Research Findings: Assessing the Communication Strategies and Products of the National Institute of Justice

## I. Introduction

The National Institute of Justice is requesting proposals to assess/evaluate its overall communications and dissemination processes and products, especially as they relate to its primary mission to develop knowledge and technology that will improve and strengthen the criminal justice system and reduce or prevent crime at the State and local levels.

This assessment is intended to review the content, format, and dissemination and use of NIJ publications, both print and electronic, and make recommendations for increasing their usefulness and efficient dissemination to target audiences.

## II. Background

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is the research, evaluation, and development arm of the U.S. Department of Justice. Created by Congress in 1968, the Institute is charged with investing public funds to develop knowledge and technology that will reduce crime, enhance public safety, and improve the administration of justice. Under its enabling legislation, NIJ is authorized to assist State and local justice systems in the following ways:

\*By conducting and sponsoring basic and applied research into the causes, prevention, and detection of crime.

\*By sponsoring evaluations of major Federal initiatives concerning crime and justice.

\*By supporting research, demonstrations, and validations to develop new approaches, techniques, systems, and equipment to improve law enforcement and the administration of justice.

\* By developing, validating, and evaluating new technologies to deter crime and enhance criminal justice operations.

\*By making recommendations to Federal, State, and local governments.

\*By conducting conferences and workshops for criminal justice policymakers and professionals.

\*By collecting and disseminating both domestic and international criminal justice information developed by the Institute or obtained from other Federal agencies.

### Disseminating Research to the Field

Congress has directed NIJ to disseminate research and development findings to criminal justice policymakers and practitioners at all levels of government and to the research community and general public. Fulfilling that mandate, NIJ uses a variety of methods to communicate to the field: print and electronic publications, conferences, videotaped seminars, Web sites, and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS). Created by NIJ in the early 1970s as a national and international criminal justice clearinghouse, NCJRS responds to queries about criminal justice matters from its print and electronic library of abstracts of more than 140,000 documents. NCJRS routinely employs a variety of feedback mechanisms to measure the quality and timeliness of services.

NIJ distributes its publications to targeted audiences ranging in size from 5,000 to 80,000, depending on the type of publication and the timeliness and topic relevance of the subject matter to identified target audiences. In 1998 the

Institute anticipates preparing about 100 reports and distributing more than 2.5 million copies of documents, most without charge. NIJ publications and other information, including the database of document abstracts maintained by the clearinghouse, are also available online and may be accessed through several Web sites (see “NIJ Online Resources” below). NIJ recently created its own homepage and launched an electronic newsletter, NIJ News.

NIJ also sponsors national and regional conferences on a wide range of topics. Among the most popular is the annual Research and Evaluation Conference, attended by 850 participants in 1997. Other recent conference topics included crime mapping, DNA technology, restorative justice, and police integrity.

NIJ produces several types of videotapes including the Research in Progress Seminar Series in which researchers describe their ongoing projects and present preliminary findings, and Perspectives on Crime and Justice, in which prominent researchers examine a criminal justice issue through the lens of public policy. These videos are available for a modest fee through NCJRS.

NIJ’s studies on research, evaluation, and technology also appear in a variety of non-governmental presentations and publications, including papers presented at conferences, newsletters, academic journals, books, magazines and the general media.

NIJ’s audiences for its communication activities have broadened considerably in recent years as crime and related drug issues have permeated all facets of society. However, NIJ’s principal constituencies are officials of the criminal justice system and State and local policymakers who are directly involved in criminal justice issues—police officers and officials, sheriffs, prosecutors, public defenders, judges, court administrators, correctional personnel including probation

officers, wardens, and jail administrators, State and local criminal justice planning staff, governors, state legislators, local policymakers and community leaders including mayors, city council representatives, and nonprofit community safety organizers. Another important audience is the academic and nonprofit research community including researchers in State and local government.

NIJ also has an increasingly large international audience, and dissemination to it is part of its statutory mission. However, NIJ’s communication strategies for reaching the international community are still being developed and hence, this audience is not part of the current assessment.

Although NIJ’s dissemination program is mandated by statute, resources to meet this mandate have not increased commensurate with the demand for research-based information about the justice system. NIJ’s existing array of communication strategies and products has been carefully developed within resource constraints.

### **III. Areas of Assessment**

NIJ’s primary area of interest in requesting this evaluation of its communication strategies and products is to obtain a critical assessment of NIJ’s delivery systems for information concerning criminal justice research, evaluation, and technology, and the usefulness of its communication strategies and specific products, (including all types of print, electronic, and other dissemination efforts) to NIJ’s constituencies. The following are examples of questions that should be addressed.

## A. Topics/Content

Is the content of NIJ products helpful and timely?  
Is it presented in a clear and readable manner?  
How much of what NIJ disseminates to the recipient is read and/or used? How has the recipient used the information in the product?  
What types of products or topics would be **more** useful to our constituents?

Do users of criminal justice research information find out about NIJ research through means other than NIJ communication strategies (e.g., newspapers, trade publications, colleagues)?  
What non-NIJ sources of research-based information are used in your office?

## B. Formats

Are the formats and style NIJ employs user-friendly? Of current NIJ products, which format does the recipient prefer? Would the recipient prefer other formats?

Is the recipient familiar with NIJ-related Web sites? What elements of NIJ Web sites are most useful? What modifications would be helpful?  
Are other justice-related Web sites routinely used by the recipient?

Are NIJ-sponsored workshops and conferences considered useful?

## C. Audiences

Is NIJ reaching the audiences that can use research and development information for policy or practice? Are communications efforts targeted at the right people in the organization? Is the information in the NIJ product distributed or shared within the organization? If so, how?  
Which target audiences are not being effectively reached, if any?

NIJ is also interested in the impact of its communications strategies and products on the research communities, i.e., academic, profit/non-profit organizations, and state/local research agencies. Do researchers find NIJ products—including NIJ's Data Resources Program—useful in carrying out research, teaching, or planning new research projects? Are they judged to be of high quality? Is NIJ research cited in professional papers? What additional research information sources and mechanisms not currently employed by NIJ would be useful?

## Requested Deliverables

A comprehensive report on assessment results, including detailed summaries of all methods used to collect data, is expected at the conclusion of the project period. An Executive Summary of 10–15 pages must be included with the final report.

The report is expected to present concrete, realistic recommendations to NIJ for improving communication strategies, including which formats are preferred by which audiences, which audiences are not being reached through existing communications vehicles, and what feedback mechanisms NIJ might employ for ongoing assessment. Recommendations should be made regarding priorities based on cost considerations and greatest need. Information on other models of research dissemination would also be useful.

Although not a central focus of the assessment, NIJ is also interested in receiving preliminary feedback about the impact of the knowledge that NIJ develops on actual justice system policies, practices, and research plans.

Quarterly progress reports will be expected. The grantee may be asked to brief NIJ staff on interim findings.

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## Elements of Proposal

Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of the following elements: conceptual approach, methodological strategy; proposed timeline for project; and organizational expertise, including descriptions of prior projects (Federal or non-Federal) focused on similar tasks.

Applicants should demonstrate an understanding of the issues inherent in communicating research information to diverse audiences, including non-scientific constituencies. Applicants are expected to present detailed methodological and management plans for carrying out an assessment of NIJ's communication strategies and products. Both quantitative and qualitative data-gathering approaches may be used. Applicants must explain and justify their proposed sampling strategy, given the diverse audiences which form NIJ's constituency. NIJ is interested in obtaining information about current users of NIJ communication products as well as nonusers. The practitioner and policy constituencies should receive more emphasis in the evaluation than the research communities.

Applicants must present a timeline for the project including milestones for completion of project tasks (e.g., instrument design, subject selection, data analysis, etc.).

## **IV. How to Apply**

Those interested in submitting proposals in response to this solicitation must complete the required application forms and submit related required documents. (See below for how to obtain application forms and guides for completing proposals.) Applicants must include the following information/forms to qualify for consideration:

- Standard Form (SF) 424—application for Federal assistance
- Assurances

- Certifications Regarding Lobbying, Debarment, Suspension and Other Responsibility Matters; and Drug-Free Workplace Requirements (one form)
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities
- Budget Detail Worksheet
- Budget Narrative
- Negotiated indirect rate agreement (if appropriate)
- Names and affiliations of all key persons from applicant and subcontractor(s), advisors, consultants, and advisory board members. Include name of principal investigator, title, organizational affiliation (if any), department (if institution of higher education), address, phone, and fax
- Proposal abstract
- Table of contents
- Program narrative or technical proposal
- Privacy certificate
- References
- Letters of cooperation from organizations collaborating in the research project
- Résumés
- Appendixes, if any (e.g., list of previous NIJ awards, their status, and products [in NIJ or other publications])

**Proposal abstract.** The proposal abstract, when read separately from the rest of the application, is meant to serve as a succinct and accurate description of the proposed work. Applicants must concisely describe the research goals and objectives, research design, and methods for achieving the goals and objectives. Summaries of past accomplishments are to be avoided, and proprietary/confidential information is not to be included. Length is not to exceed 400 words. Use the following two headers:

**Project Goals and Objectives:**

**Proposed Research Design and Methodology:**

**Page limit.** The number of pages in the "Program Narrative" part of the proposal must not exceed 40 double-spaced pages.

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**Due date.** Completed proposals **must be received** at the National Institute of Justice by the close of business on September 15, 1998. Extensions of this deadline will not be permitted.

**Award period.** The award period for this project is not to exceed 9 months. Proposed project completion in a shorter timeframe will be considered in the evaluation of proposals. Applications should indicate a project start date of December 1, 1998.

**Number of awards.** NIJ anticipates supporting 1 award under this solicitation in the amount of up to \$250,000.

**Applying.** Two packets need to be obtained: (1) application forms (including a sample budget worksheet) and (2) guidelines for submitting proposals (including requirements for proposal writers and requirements for grant recipients). To receive them, applicants can:

- Access the Justice Information Center on the web:  
<http://www.ncjrs.org/fedgrant.htm#NIJ>  
or the NIJ web site:  
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/NIJ/funding.htm>  
These web sites offer the NIJ application forms and guidelines as electronic files that may be downloaded to a personal computer.
- Request hard copies of the forms and guidelines by mail from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service at 800-851-3420 or from the Department of Justice Response

Center at 800-421-6770 (in the Washington, D.C., area, at 202-307-1480).

- Request copies by fax. Call 800-851-3420 and select option 1, then option 1 again for NIJ. Code is 1023.

**NIJ Online Resources.** NIJ's portfolio covers a diverse and dynamic array of research, development and technology topics. For more information, applicants may wish to consult the 1997 NIJ Research Portfolio, which lists ongoing NIJ research and development through June 1997 with project descriptions. Also, NIJ's 1998 Research Prospectus, Building Knowledge about Crime and Justice outlines NIJ's current research and development activity. The NIJ Publications Catalog, Sixth Edition 1986-1996 provides a comprehensive listing of NIJ publications by topic area. All can be accessed at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij).

**Guidance and information.** Applicants who wish to receive additional guidance and information should contact Dr. Christy Visher at 202-307-0694.

## Send completed forms to:

[Solicitation name—from title on cover]  
National Institute of Justice  
810 Seventh Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20531  
[overnight courier ZIP code 20001]

To find out more information about the National Institute of Justice, please contact:

**National Criminal Justice Reference Service**

Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
800-851-3420  
e-mail: askncjrs@ncjrs.org

To obtain an electronic version of this document, access  
the NIJ web site (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij>).

If you have any questions, call or e-mail NCJRS.